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## Volunteer firefighter jailed after lighting fires as payback to CFA

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A volunteer firefighter who had a beef with his local CFA station and lit bushfires as payback has been jailed.

County Court judge Mark Taft said Andrew Robert Briggs' crimes struck "at the heart" of communities such as Great Western, in western Victoria, where the disgruntled firefighter lit a fire in March 2013 and four more in November and December of 2014.



Briggs lit the first fire after being left off a CFA team that fought an extensive blaze. Photo: AFR

Briggs lit the first fire about a month he had been left off a CFA team that fought an extensive fire, the court heard on Wednesday.

Briggs' fire was contained to five square metres and investigators found paper there, including an IGA receipt with his name on it.

In late 2014 Briggs lit two small fires around midnight one night, one blaze that burnt about 10 acres and another that burnt about a quarter of an acre.

The court heard Briggs told police he started fires to "piss off a few people" and that local firefighters had given him a "friggin' hard time". He told police: "I do get pissed off about a heap of people... I don't know how to get back at the pricks."

Judge Taft on Wednesday jailed the 49-year-old for nine months and ordered he pay \$40,000 compensation to the CFA.

"Your offending strikes at the heart of the rural community," Judge Taft told him.

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"Bushfires have wrought great misery on those who live in the bush. Lives have been lost and property and livestock have been destroyed.

"It was only good fortune that the fires that you lit were confined and little damage occurred. That you lit fires to get even with those in the CFA, who you believed had slighted you, makes your moral culpability all the greater."

Briggs pleaded guilty to four counts of recklessly causing a bushfire and one of possessing items for the purpose of destroying or damaging property.

Police found matches, cigarette lighters, firelighters and paper in his car.

Briggs, the court heard, had lived in Great Western all his life and joined the CFA as a teenager. As an adult he lived with his parents, was socially isolated and worked casual jobs shearing and at wineries.

A forensic psychologist found Briggs was angry at the CFA but that was overtaken by the satisfaction he gained from lighting fires. But he did not meet the classification for pyromania, the psychologist found, and was a low to moderate risk of reoffending.

Briggs has already served 150 days in custody and must serve a three-year community corrections order, with close supervision, once released.

Judge Taft did not order unpaid work as part of the order, given Briggs could encounter hostility in the community.